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ABSTRACT

N.F.S. Grundtvig was a priest, historian, poet, and founder of the Danish Folk High School. He believed that education for adults should be geared to adults and wanted schools to be independent of the church. Grundtvig was among the first to call for Denmark's schools to use the native Danish language. Grundtvig believed that each group or culture of people who shared the same language had its own national spirit or folk's spirit that should allow for free and fruitful interaction between generations and all social classes. He advocated establishing folk schools that would cater exclusively to the life experiences of adults, and he envisioned the folk school's mission as helping students think for themselves, learn to distinguish between true and false values, provide useful subjects that students wanted to know, and arouse students' interest and widen their horizon with a new view of the world. According to Grundtvig, folk schools would include time for individual work in a library, and conversations. Grundtvig's influence extended to the United States, where he also influenced the work of several specialists in adult education, including Malcolm Knowles, Martin Knowlton, Olive Campbell, and Myles Horton and the development of institutions such as Ashland College, Elderhostel, Campbell Folk School and Highlander Folk School. (Contains 12 references.) (MN)

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The Seeds of Social Change from Denmark

The purpose of this paper is to examine the person of N.F. S. Grundtvig in light of the history of adult education. This paper will show the influence of Grundtvig extends beyond his homeland of Denmark to several key adult educators in the United States. Grundtvig's ideas had a bearing on many influential educators, including Eduard Lindeman, Myles Horton, Malcolm Knowles, Martin Knowlton and John Campbell. Interestingly many of them traveled to visit the schools in Denmark.

This paper focuses on the person of Grundtvig, the Danish Folk School, and its eventual influence on adult education especially in the United States. This paper will show the current focus of adult education in the United States for "liberal, vocational, personal growth, and remedial needs" (Merriam & Brockett, 1997, p.1) was also represented in Grundtvig's Danish Folk High School. However, on a grander scale the issue of social change, democratic action, and economic justice are actually sentiments that have been discussed and fought throughout history. In another sense one could say that adult education's impact on social change from the Danish Folk School to the Highlander Folk School is one example of this process throughout in our history (Personal Communication, Soren Ehlers, December 8, 2000).

The Person of Grundtvig

Baseball, basketball, and volleyball originated in the United States, perhaps football, and maybe soccer. Some think the public school system, as well as adult education were American ideas. A closer look will indicate football, soccer, the school system, and perhaps adult education began in other places than our own United States. In fact some people contend that adult education actually began in Denmark as a result of

the influence of N.F. S. Grundtvig (Personal Communication, Soren Ehlers, November, 2, 2000). Not only did Grundtvig's ideas help to inspire the Danish people, but also several Americans crossed the ocean to see what was actually happening, and among these visitors were Eduard Lindeman, Myles Horton, Martin Knowlton, Olive Campbell, and Malcolm Knowles (Personal Communication, Soren Ehlers, October, 30, 2000).

Grundtvig became the "great creative genius that became a source of inspiration to much of the new life in Denmark" (Manniche, 1960, 1952, p.92). He was a priest, historian, poet, founder of the Folk High School, and of immense importance to the peasant culture in Denmark. His ideas on society and religion have brought inspiration in Denmark and around the world (Christensen, 1983). Grundtvig was from an average family background, yet was able to attend college and the university. He became an intellectual. He was born in 1783, lived for 90 years, had three wives, and his last child was fathered when he was 77! The man was involved in all phases of Danish life from writing, preaching, speaking, and being a member of Parliament (Manniche, 1960, 1952).

Grundtvig had been raised in a religious environment, yet he did not personally embrace the true essence of Christianity until he was a young man in his twenties. Grundtvig had several personal crises, falling in love with a woman who could not return his love, seeing his traditional faith questioned, as well as the hardship of the people of Denmark. This resulted in a crisis of faith that brought about a "personal relationship with the Almighty" (p. 95). His faith went beyond traditional churches, the Lutheran and the Catholic, to a personal and individual relationship with God. After his Christian awakening he became a man of joy, rather than a harsh judge of other's behavior. (Manniche 1960, 1952).

Because of Grundtvig's insistence on using the Danish language, he eventually was censored in the Danish church and culture. During this time he was granted permission to study at Oxford in England. He returned from England with renewed hope and new ideas. Grundtvig wanted to instill courage, power, and freedom to his people similar to what he witnessed in England. He became obsessed with the Danish people, especially the common man and the peasant. Grundtvig began to see that education of the adult would play a significant role in changing the face of the nation. He felt that education for the adult should be geared to the adult, which would represent lifelong learning, civil society, and enlightenment rather than learning. He also wanted a school that would be independent of the church, in order that the individual could interpret Christianity the way they wanted (Personal communication, Soren Ehlers, November 2, 2000 & December 8, 2000).

Grundtvig despised the typical Latin schools where the privileged sent their children. He even called them 'black schools or schools of death', and he felt strongly that the native Danish language should be used. But more than this he felt the Catholic and the Lutheran churches should also be in the native tongue. This influence resulted in a more personal and open religion for the people, and increased the literature in the Danish language throughout the country (Paulston, 1980). This seems to be a theme throughout his life; for example, he felt the spoken word from Jesus to his twelve disciples was far more powerful than the written word that was passed down later. The more important spiritual issue was to be told by another person about the life and words of the Bible, rather than reading it from the text (Personal Communication, Soren Ehlers, December 8, 2000).

One of his important issues was that education for the adult would be in the native tongue of the learner, unlike the University that was taught in Latin. Grundtvig was one of the first to express ideas such as the importance of a thorough knowledge of one's culture and country, learning to express ones ideas and thoughts, no testing or exams to determine knowledge, and to make excursions into the country to learn what is going on firsthand (Mannechin, 1960, 1952). Grundtvig believed that the most important influence was a personal one that focused on the language of the individual, speech from one person to another. He states, "…Living word means simply that the warm emphatic spoken work, the living expression of a personality, is the medium through which the spirit is reached and stirred, far more effectively than through books, the 'dead word'…." (McNelley, 1996, p.3).

According to Grundtvig, life was rich, deep and powerful, and each person must have the ability to live according to the impulse of his or her own choice, he essentially was fighting for the liberty of all. He felt that within each group or culture of people, that shared the same language there was a national spirit or folk's spirit stamped on them. This spirit should allow for a free and fruitful interaction between generations and all social classes. Rather than a dangerous nationalism, this was intended to promote a knowledge and pride of one's culture and country.

Grundtvig's influence did not just reside with the beginning of the Folk School; he had many personal followers who called themselves "grundtvigians". They followed his ideals that religion focused on a personal relationship with God that resulted in a practical working relationship impacting all of one's life. Rather than focusing on penance, conversion, or suffering, these people focused on forgiveness and joy

(Christensen, 1983). Grundtvig was essentially a Christian apologist who continually affirmed the truth of the spoken word of the Bible rather than the written, the Augsburg Confession, as well as the believing and confessing church (Grundtvig, 1906).

Danish Folk School

Grundtvig made the suggestion of a folk school, however it was actually others who shared his ideas that carried out these thoughts. One of the early pioneers was Christen Kold and Rasmus Sorenson. They wanted a school that was to exclusively cater to the life experiences of adults rather than the current model to children. These schools would have no marks or exams that would judge the students, they also believed that the teachers should be so engrossed in their subjects that their love of learning would be inspirational to the student. The teachers should teach with emotion, tone, and body language that reflect that there is a personal interest and love for what they are saying. Grundtvig would not allow a dead teacher to teach a dead topic; rather it should be joyful, happy, inspirational and emotional (Personal Communication, Soren Ehlers, December 8, 2000).

One of the purposes of the school was to help students to think for themselves, to teach to distinguish between true and false values, and to strengthen the student's will to choose the right way. Often, public meetings would be held so that the information would also be available to the nearby community. The overall goal is to provide useful subjects that the students want to know, to arouse new interest and to widen the student's horizons with new view of the world (Mannechin, 1969, 1952).

Students would first gather for two – three hours daily, followed by a question and answer time with individual work in the library. There would be special hours set

aside for study circles and conversations. Students are encouraged to prepare individually for these lectures and to develop their own judgment. There never would be an attempt to clarify, classify or stamp intelligence through the use of exams, degrees, or marks. In 1944 there were 54 Folk High School, 24 Agricultural Schools, and in 1948 there were 6500 students in 59 Folk High Schools (Manniche, 1969, 1952).

A look at the typical day of a student offers interesting insight into the philosophy of the Danish Folk School. The schools were open to all adults, and the minimum age was 18. The homelike atmosphere was steeped in a foundation of the simple life reflected a development of one's personal motivation, spiritual harmony, and harmony with nature. The students would awaken early in the morning, and leave their hard beds usually shared by two to four pupils. In one school the principal may present a lecture about the teaching of another Danish philosopher such as Soren Kierkegaard. After this would be a required morning song, where all the students would gather for a brief time of religious reflection and singing. During the day, an observer would notice a free and easy association between students and teachers. For example, teachers would be as companions to the students involved with studies as well as spontaneous snow fights. Art, singing, and history lessons are used to teach the humanities (Manniche, 1960, 1952; Fain, 1980).

The folk schools became famous for their living, warm, and moving lectures of history, with the attempt to unite the current age with a living past. Behind all of the lectures and the philosophy of the school is the undeniable presence of a living and active God who reveals Himself in History. All of the students participate in some type of gymnastics. During the day smaller groups with a teacher will meet for a guided

discussion about some current event. The mid-day break is about two hours, encouraging resting, relaxing, as well as conversation with others. The focus in the afternoon is on reading, writing, and proficiency of the Danish language. Mutual help among the students is encouraged. Interestingly, some discipline was enforced such as lights were out at 10:30. The school is actually a home where all sit together at meals with the principal and his family and the teachers. Mealtime was meant for fellowship, conversation, and laughter. In essence, all the pupils had to do was listen, discuss, get to know each other, develop a trust in one another, and learn to express and form their own opinions (Manniche, 1960, 1952; Fain, 1980).

The Influence in the United States

With the influx of Scandinavian immigrants and especially Danish citizens to the United States, there was an attempt to begin a Danish Folk School on American soil. Although the idea was to help the Danish immigrant, most of them had already assimilated into American culture. There were several attempts in large Danish communities, yet of the 10 schools, most lasted a few years (Larson, 1980). Although this was a nice attempt of well-intentioned parents to keep the Danish culture in tack, it simply could not keep up with the process of acculturation demanded by the American system on their children.

Of greater significance was the influence of the Danish Folk schools on people such as Malcolm Knowles, Martin Knowlton, Olive Campbell, Myles Horton, as well as institutions such as Ashland College, Highlander Folk School, Elderhostel, and Campbell Folk School. These three schools had people who had visited the Danish Folk School in Denmark to witness the school and its potential in helping people who had been

marginalized by the rapidly expanding American system. In addition some writers feel that the beginning of the cooperative extension service, as well as the 4-H clubs were other examples that portrayed the philosophy of the Danish Folk School. Olive Campbell, the wife of John Campbell, felt a school like the Danish Folk School could perhaps help meet the needs of people in the rural Southern Appalachia. This particular school emphasized folk art, handcrafts, manual skills and vocational improvement (McNelley, 1966). The Ashland College was for adults who had been out of high school at least one year. The objectives of this school include avoiding the red tape that was a part of typical higher education, it was open for all adults who wanted to learn, and focused on people attempting to form their own ideas of education. Myles Horton started a program in Tennessee after traveling to Denmark that focused on labor organizations and integration. The concept of residential adult education began to spread all across the USA, especially with an emphasis on many of Grundtvig's ideas. These ideas were education of noncredit, freedom of expression, the development of whole person, and it was open to all adults (Larson, 1980). Martin Knowlton was inspired during a trip to Europe, where he became very familiar with the youth hostel programs and the folks schools in Scandinavia. Seeing firsthand the positive impact of residential settings on adult education became the critical moment in the establishment and naming of Elderhostel (Mills, 1993).

Of special interest is the Highlander Folk School that began with ideas of Myles Horton. Horton was sent to organize a vacation Bible School for children in rural Tennessee; he soon realized the games and lessons did not really have much use for the daily problems of these children and their social context. He invited the parents of the

children to visit the church in order to discuss their problems. Horton began to see how a sense of community and sharing of ideas could help influence marginalized people to solve their problems. The people began to realize that many of the problems they had experienced could be solved by one another, and even more important was that in coming together they experienced a community that was more powerful than being alone (Adams, 1990).

Horton was also influenced by the philosophy of Rienhold Niebuhr and Eduard Lindeman, but his visit to the Danish Folk School perhaps gave him the motivation to translate his dream into a practical reality. During his time at the Folk High School, Horton was impressed by policies of no grades, ranking, or exams, but far more with the emotionally charged causes and how students debated important topics. During this time Horton even learned the Danish language in order to communicate with the people, he visited many of the folk schools throughout Scandinavia as well as interviewed many people. As a result of this informal research project four major issues stood out to Horton. First, the directors of the folk schools were unconventional educators; they were people on fire with the awareness of injustice and a determination to correct it. Second, the folk school sought to evoke in the students a picture of how life should be, and used cultural topics such as music, dance, poetry to ignite revolutionary sparks in the students. Third, The folk schools sought to instill feelings and personal will rather than just memory or logic. And fourth, the teachers at the folk schools had close relationships with the students, and were themselves learners, they taught by their own personal capacity to learn. Horton clearly began to see his purpose, he wanted a school similar but not like the folk schools, he wanted a place where common people could learn, where they could

speak for themselves, and gain greater control over the decisions affecting their daily life (Adams, 1980).

After returning, Horton and Niebuhr immediately made plans, raised money, found a location and staff. Initially Highlander Folk School began with 25 students, and taught psychology, cultural geography, revolutionary literature, and social issues. There were also seminars on how social change is brought about. Highlander became quickly involved in helping local people to organize against the large industries that were affecting their lives, especially mining. Eventually Highlander became a place where segregation and equality for blacks in the south was addressed. Labor unions, civil rights, and adult literacy became the focus of Highlander and its impact was felt all over the country. Horton wanted the staff of Highlander to display friendship, democracy and cooperation with one another as well as with those who were at Highlander. Part of the work of Highlander was to be involved in the communities, this brought several of the staff into dangerous situations, yet sealed their commitment to social change. When people came to Highlander they did not want to just tell the 'students' what to do, rather they wanted to create a safe place where they could decide their own issues (Adams, 1980).

Similar to the Danish Folk School, Highlander encouraged people to find beauty and pride in their own ways, to speak their own ideas and language without humiliation, and to learn their own power through organization and community. Although the Danish Folk School focused more on specific teaching for vocation, the Highlander movement centered around helping adults to organize in order to change their daily life for social equality. Highlander sought to develop democracy, rather than academic discipline, and

felt what was most important is that which would be tested in their real life. Highlander is actually evolving, and rather vague, it wants each group to come with their own agenda (Adams, 1980). This parallels Grundtvig's ideas that adult learning can be fashioned to produce indigenous solution to meet specific problems of daily life. This meets the learner where he/she is, but eventually moves them to a larger view and concept, with new ways of learning and solving problems (Bergevin, 1967).

Summary

As a result of these readings my personal interest in Highlander was great. On a recent trip to Highlander, December 1, 2000, I was able to see first hand the fruition of Horton's dream. First I noticed the name was Highlander Research and Education Center, rather than Highlander Folk School. Similar to visiting a home of a famous person who has passed away, the walk through the historically active rooms of Highlander seemed empty and devoid of emotionally charged issues. A cold fireplace, empty rocking chairs greeted tired grad students trying to get warm and comfortable in a new surrounding.

The next morning we met with one of the current staff at Highlander who briefed us on current happenings at the Center. The central focus of Highlander and its staff of 16 seem to be the same - working with people struggling against oppression and supporting their effort to take collective action to shape their own destiny. The center seeks to create educational experiences that will empower people to take democratic leadership towards fundamental change. Listening sessions are often the occurrence, when groups of people come to the center and they gather in the circle of rocking chairs and listen to one another. The goal is clearly democratic participation and economic justice in a world where oppression is the plight of many people. Highlander has not bought into the

popular and capitalistic notion of leadership development, rather similar to Grundtvig, the focus is helping indigenous groups to improve their life. The 100-acre farm hopes to provide space where a safe connection can take place, and even the leader mentioned perhaps Paulo Freire's 'conscientization' can take place. Similar to Grundtvig, music, poetry, dancing, is encouraged. Current groups are often Latin Americans who are participating in learning for democratic action and economic justice.

As I wandered around the grounds, I thought where are the ideas of N.F.S. Grundtvig, Eduard Lindeman, or Niebhur? I could not find a picture of Grundtvig, or even a symbol of Danish culture. If I had not known about Horton, I would have missed him also. These people, like many in history whose ideas help people to press forward in the light of oppression are not so consumed with their own ideas and image, rather for real change to occur. But a closer look, one could detect a Danish influence in the ideas of the school. The rocking chair as the symbol of Highlander reflects a relaxed, or perhaps even pensive attitude, a time away, to ponder and reflect on what is right or what is wrong. To be relaxed, to sit, to be cozy in one's world to talk, discuss, or argue about social change. Grundtvig's ideas were precipitated into the Danish Folk School, this in turn became something visible, living, and that Horton could visit. He in turn took this particular school and shaped it into his own version of an adult education that could result in a social change. Like a seed from a distant country that promises growth and new life, Horton brought back seeds of change from Denmark, and it has grown, changed, and evolved into social justice around Appalachia, the South, and the world.

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